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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000323

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

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TAGS: [IS](#) [KPKO](#) [LE](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [UN](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: ISRAELI FIRE KILLS LEBANESE TEENAGER NEAR
BLUE LINE

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) According to UNIFIL Senior Adviser Milos Strugar, UNIFIL's initial assessment is that the Lebanese teenager shot by Israeli forces near the Blue Line on February 1 was killed in Lebanese territory and probably was not a Hizballah fighter. UNIFIL peacekeepers found the body 44 meters north of the Blue Line and said the scene suggested he was shot and fell at that spot. Strugar added that Israeli liaison to UNIFIL did not deny the teenager was shot while inside Lebanon, but claimed he had first crossed the Blue Line into Israeli-controlled territory and fired the first shot. The Lebanese reaction has been strong, with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora condemning the incident and Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah threatening retaliation. In the opinion of former UNIFIL spokesman Timur Goksel, the most likely scenario was that the Lebanese shepherd inadvertently crossed over the poorly marked demarcation line and was shot by "panicky" Israeli soldiers. He did think it likely the shepherd was a Hizballah fighter. Hizballah's reaction came on the afternoon of February 3 in the form of mortar shelling, prompting Israeli counter-fire. After two hours, a ceasefire was brokered that seems (as of this writing) to be holding. End summary.

UNIFIL: DEAD TEENAGER PROBABLY
KILLED IN LEBANON

12. (C) On February 3, UNIFIL Senior Adviser Milos Strugar briefed econoff on the shooting of a Lebanese teenager near the Blue Line on February 1. Strugar said the individual, described in Lebanese press as a shepherd named Ibrahim Rahil, aged either 15 or 17, was recovered by UNIFIL peacekeepers on February 2 and turned over to Lebanese authorities. The UNIFIL peacekeepers found Rahil's body on the Lebanese side of the border, some 44 meters north of the line (UTM: 748,688/685928). UNIFIL is still working on a preliminary report, but its initial analysis is that Rahil was shot while on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line and is based on evidence at the site. First, the body had several bullet wounds, including one in the head, making it less likely that he was shot in Israeli-controlled territory and then made his way back to Lebanon before dying. Second, the way that the rocks and dirt were disturbed indicated he had fallen on that spot. Also, Rahil's shotgun (a rusty, single-barrel model) was found lying next to him. Third, a goat shot dead was found next to the body, suggesting it too had been caught in rifle fire. Strugar added the age of Rahil, in addition to the poor condition of his shotgun and

dead goat nearby, suggest he was in fact a shepherd. According to Strugar, UNIFIL could not determine whether the shotgun had been fired.

13. (C) Strugar said that Israeli liaison did not challenge UNIFIL's preliminary analysis that Rahil was shot inside Lebanese territory. Israeli liaison confirmed that Israeli forces had fired on the teenager, but only after he had crossed the line into Israeli-occupied territory in the area of Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills. Israeli liaison did not deny that IDF had shot the individual after he had crossed back into Lebanon, but claimed he had fired first. Strugar said UNIFIL will be investigating the area on the Israeli side of the line on February 3. Strugar stressed that UNIFIL is working closely with both the Lebanese and Israeli forces to maintain calm, but indicated the Blue Line remains tense.

LEBANESE REACT STRONGLY

14. (SBU) The Lebanese reacted with outrage to the incident. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora raised the issue in Parliament on February 2, calling the incident "a blatant assault against Lebanon's sovereignty" and asserted that the victim was shot on Lebanese territory. Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh summoned the P-5 ambassadors to the ministry on the morning of February 3 to discuss the incident (see septel). Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah issued a bellicose statement earlier, threatening, "if this civilian had been killed, then the resistance would punish the killers without hesitation or any discussion." Nasrallah had vowed retaliation even before the body was found, when the individual was presumed to be detained by Israeli forces.

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The victim's funeral in the Lebanese village in Shebaa was tense, with villagers calling for revenge. Representatives of Hizballah, Amal and the Mufti of Marjayoun attended the funeral. The young man's father urged Hizballah to avenge his son's death and accused UNIFIL of negligence. (Comment: Given that the victim was from the Sunni village of Shebaa and the Sunni Mufti of Marjayoun attended the funeral, indications are that he was a Sunni Muslim. End comment.)

15. (C) On February 3, former UNIFIL spokesman Timur Goksel shared his analysis of the incident with econoff. Goksel said he doubted the victim was a Hizballah fighter because he was too young and he carried a weapon ill-suited for combat. Goksel said he believed the young man was either alone or with another teenager. Goksel explained that, in his experience, Hizballah almost always sent its fighters in groups for operations and did not use soldiers of that age. He speculated that the more plausible scenario was that the young man was indeed a shepherd who had inadvertently crossed the line, which is poorly marked in that area, known as Bastra Farm. Goksel blamed "panicky" Israeli conscripts for opening fire prematurely, an event he says occurred periodically when he was working for UNIFIL. He commented this incident just played into the hands of Hizballah and gives it an excuse to retaliate with an attack along the line.

HIZBALLAH REACTS WITH MORTAR SHELLS

16. (C) On February 3 at approximately 1530 hrs. local, Hizballah launched mortar shells at Israeli positions in the Shebaa Farms. Strugar briefed econoff on the situation, saying that despite press reports of Hizballah launching rockets at the Shebaa Farms, UNIFIL peacekeepers observed only mortar shelling coming from the Lebanese side. UNIFIL observed Israeli forces returning fire with tank and artillery rounds. Israel also launched several airstrikes in the area of Kfar Shouba. Israeli liaison issued an "activity warning" to UNIFIL covering the whole Blue Line. As of 1715

hrs. local, Strugar reported to econoff that he had received assurances from both the Lebanese and Israeli sides that they would cease firing. Strugar suspected that an Israeli soldier was wounded in the fighting, but Israeli liaison would not confirm this. For the previous two hours, the ceasefire has held.

COMMENT

17. (C) The area of the incident near "Bastra Farm" is located in the area that Lebanese refer to as the Kfar Shouba Hills. The location of the incident may be coincidence, but the recent adoption of the phrase "Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills" by both the GOL and Hizballah is of note. End comment.
FELTMAN